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ABSTRACT

The National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) developed and tested a self-evaluation instrument to be used by unit schools (having grades K-12 under one administration and usually under the same roof or at least on the same grounds). A National Advisory Committee wrote the new instrument, compiling items from existing NSSE evaluative materials designed for elementary, junior high, and high schools, and adding items to meet the special evaluative needs of unit schools. Eleven schools participated in a 1981-82 pilot study. Faculties at the pilot schools completed the evaluation and responded to a postevaluation questionnaire; steering committee chairpersons were also interviewed. Questionnaire results showed that the new instrument was rated Good or Excellent by 69% of those responding and Fair or Poor by 31%. As major strengths of the instrument, participants mentioned that: (1) it promoted a total overview of the schools' programs; (2) it was thorough and comprehensive; and (3) it promoted interaction. The responses from steering committee chairpersons were similar, but they cited as the chief strength the fact that articulation was encouraged. Both groups cited repetitiousness and vagueness of some items as overall weaknesses. The instrument was revised to remedy these weaknesses. Since its publication in March 1983, over 3,000 copies have been purchased. (LPG)

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The Development of the National Study of School Evaluation's K-12 School Evaluative Criteria

Since 1933 the National Study of School Evaluation, originally called the Cooperative Study of Secondary School Standards, has developed materials to aid the self study participants effectively view their school programs. Originally, the Cooperative Study of Secondary School Standards produced evaluative materials only for high schools. But in the 1960's requests were made to evaluate Junior High/Middle Schools and Elementary Schools. For that reason Evaluative Criteria were created for each of these educational levels and the name of the organization was changed to the National Study of School Evaluation.

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Unfortunately, until the 1980's the unit schools had not been afforded the convenience or benefit of a published instrument which spanned the entire educational spectrum. Unit schools are those schools that contain grades K-12 under one administration and usually under the same roof (or at least on the same grounds). Oftentimes one finds unit schools to be private or parochial schools and academies or schools in small communities. There are numerous unit schools in the U.S. today and overseas several Department of Defense schools are classified as unit schools, as well. Until 1983 faculties at unit schools had been forced to use one or two basic methods for the purpose of a total school (K-12) self study. First, they could have chosen to use separate instruments for each educational division where elementary schools use criteria developed for the primary and intermediate grades, middle schools use criteria developed for the middle grades, and high schools use criteria developed for secondary schools. Employing this method, the entire system undergoes self study but does not use a common instrument. Other educators have chosen to modify one of the existing instruments so that it could be used by all grade levels. Indeed, the continued interest of many school districts to appropriately view

formal education as a continuous process caused the National Study of School Evaluation (hereafter referred to as NSSE) to develop an instrument specifically designed to meet the needs of the K-12 schools.

Boyer has said that the number of small districts that have undergone K-12 self studies has increased. According to her, one of the major objectives of such a grand scale evaluation is to examine the learning experiences from K-12 to see if they are well articulated. It is, therefore, important that articulation be defined. Alexander and George described articulation as "the joining together of educational units and agencies essential to maintenance of the continuity, flexibility and scope educational opportunities must demonstrate in the learning society ahead." Campanale defined articulation as "a process which provides a degree of continuity and consistency in the offerings of the successive grades of the school system." Coulter has maintained it is "the close vertical integration of the various levels of the school organization which is designed to promote smooth pupil progress and adjustment from one level to the next higher level" while Blanchard has considered it to be a prerequisite to accountability; it represents the

coordinating elements so that objectives, content, activities and experiences, teaching, and evaluation are all cohesive.

The advantage of a K-12 study identified by 100 percent of both teachers and administrators in the Boyer study was "(the) opportunity to examine the articulation of the K-12 learning experience from level to level."

Therefore, after numerous requests, the Board of Directors of the NSSE determined that a K-12 instrument was needed and in accordance with the decision Dr. Donald C. Manlove, Executive Director, set about to develop such materials. A National Advisory Committee was appointed to serve as the writing team. Some members served as consultants to the schools selected to participate in the field test of the instrument. The six regional accrediting associations were contacted and the development of the proposed instrument explained. These associations were requested to submit recommendations so that their specific needs would be reflected in the new instrument. The writing team was requested to draw heavily on other NSSE publications since these instruments had been field tested and used by numerous schools across the nation. By using pertinent items from other NSSE materials and by adding those items the

writing team members thought would be pertinent to a K-12 self study, a set of proto-typed (unpublished) materials was created.

Twelve schools were selected to be the pilot institutions from a list of schools recommended by the six accrediting associations. Each school was assigned a contact person from the National Advisory Committee who introduced the newly developed, proto-typed materials and explained what the NSSE and the researchers would be expecting from the pilot schools. Eleven schools actually completed the pilot study.

During the 1981-1982 school year, faculties at the pilot schools were involved in their self studies. As they were engaged in their subcommittee meetings, they critiqued the instrument by writing their comments on one copy of the proposed K-12 School Evaluative Criteria. Upon (or near) completion of the self study, the participants were asked to complete a questionnaire. In addition, the steering committee chairmen were interviewed to get information from their points of view regarding the self study process and the use of the proposed instrument. The questionnaire and interview items were analyzed and the data presented by the Executive Director and his research associate to the

National Advisory Committee in May of 1982, in Scottsdale, Arizona. The suggestions were analyzed and pertinent ones incorporated into the instrument.

Hence, this study identified the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed K-12 School Evaluative Criteria and sought to determine if true opinions could be expressed via this instrument and if the instrument was adequate to evaluate the quality of education offered in K-12 schools.

The findings represent a 70% return rate for the questionnaire. (For the sake of honesty in commenting, these were anonymous so there was no way to do an individual follow-up on all of the unreturned questionnaires.) The interviews represent 100% participation by the steering committee chairmen.

The self study participants were first asked to indicate their reactions to each of the 13 sections of the proto-typed K-12 School Evaluative Criteria on which they had worked. They were to base their responses on the content, clarity, and contribution of the section to the total instrument.

The total number of responses from this questionnaire item was 670 with 465 (69%) receiving Good or Excellent ratings and 205, (31%) receiving Fair and Poor ratings.

The participants were then asked to list what they saw as the overall strengths of the instrument. This was an open ended item so participants could write as much, or as little, as they desired.

The most frequently mentioned strength of this instrument was that it promoted a total overview of the schools' programs so strengths and weaknesses could be seen. This characteristic was listed by 100 (38%) of the participants. The instrument's thorough and comprehensive nature was mentioned by 69 (26%) of the participants. Thirty-six (14%) of the respondents found the instrument's great potential to promote interaction as an overall strength. Other strengths included the instrument's organization and the fact that it promoted self introspection.

Steering Committee chairmen were also asked what they believed were the major strengths of the instrument.

There were eleven personal or telephone interviews between the Contact Persons and the steering committee chairmen. The responses from the chairmen of the steering committees were very similar. The major strength of the instrument, according to seven (64%) of the chairmen, was that articulation was encouraged. Mentioned by six (55%) of the chairmen was the

comprehensiveness of the document followed by the forced awareness of the entire school program which was mentioned by five (45%) of the chairmen. The interaction of the faculty was also considered a strength by four (36%) of the chairmen as was viewing the goals and objectives of the school program, mentioned by three (27%) of the interviewees.

The inverse of this question asked the individual participants to list major weaknesses of the overall instrument.

A major weakness of the unpublished materials, according to 64 (24%) of the respondents was the abundance of repetitious questions.

The second most frequently mentioned weakness, listed by 55 (21%) of the people was there were many vague questions. The third most frequently mentioned weakness was the length of the instrument, and thereby the time involved; this was listed by 49 (19%) of the respondents. A characteristic which was mentioned by 45 (17%) of the participants as a major weakness was the poor use of terminology. Eight people (3%) felt the instrument had no major weakness. Fifty-seven (22%) of the 264 respondents did not comment.

Likewise, the steering committee chairmen were asked what they believed were the major weaknesses of the instrument.

The responses from the steering committee chairmen indicated that the major weakness of the instrument was the repetitiousness of items. This was mentioned by eight (73%) of the responding eleven chairmen. Six (55%) of the chairmen found the terminology to be a weakness. The vague nature of some items was another weakness, according to five (45%) chairmen. Other weaknesses included the charts, the difficulty in correlating grade levels, the format of the instrument, the detailed nature of the instrument, and the time involved to complete the proposed K-12 School Evaluative Criteria.

Next, the participants were asked to decide if the structure of this instrument provided them with an opportunity to express their true opinions of the school's program.

Overall 209.5 (79%) of the respondents said the structure was such that true opinions could be expressed and 37.5 (14%) said the structure did not provide this freedom. Seventeen (7%) chose not to comment.

Next, the participants were asked to determine

whether or not the proposed instrument was adequate to evaluate quality education.

Despite the fact 15 (6%) said it was not adequate and 87 (33%) said it was adequate "as is," 132 (50%) of the participants felt revision was compulsory to totally meet the needs in the K-12 school. Twenty nine people (11%) chose not to comment and one person (<1%) was undecided. It became obvious that revision was needed before the instrument could be published. The areas needing revision became clear upon examining individual section ratings.

Summary

The National Advisory Committee examined all evidence and scrutinized over revisions. The committee members were assigned to subcommittees to rewrite various sections after viewing questionnaire responses (as well as steering committee chairmen's responses, Contact Person's ideas, and changes the participants at each school had written directly on their proto-typed instrument). Repetitious items were dropped and vague questions were rewritten. The changed sections were presented to the entire National Advisory Committee and a glossary was added to clarify terminology used in the instrument. The co-editors, Donald C. Manlove, Vernon

Pace, and Susan K. Ramp, refined the instrument and a copy editor was hired from Indiana University to read and edit all copy.

The document was published in March of 1983 with most of the suggested changes. But as with any newly published document, further refinement may be necessary. Since 3209 copies of the published document have been purchased as of April 30, 1986, (according to the NSSE's Business Manager) it is recommended that a new study be conducted to assess the adequacy of the newly revised and published K-12 School Evaluative Criteria.

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